Tenebris Agni Ascensionem

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Tenebris Agni Ascensionem

by WitchZakuro

Summary

Life was a struggle for survival from the moment Will Graham awoke with the memories of his past life in the world of a novel he must of read.

The Raven of Bones was a dark, tragic romance between Lady Alana Bloom and Duke Hannibal Lecter. The world was full of magic and grave conspiracies against the Crown. Murder and revenge were common themes, and Will knew who the true Villain of the story was.

He wants nothing less than to be involved in the story and the characters within it, even as he awakens magic he should not have and catches the attention of those he would rather not.

The game only begins when he catches the attention of the one he wanted to avoid most and the world will certainly suffer for it.

Notes

This abomination of a story is absolutely based on romance Isekai / Otome / Reincarnation Manhwa, full disclosure.

Despite that, I took this story very seriously. It is very dark and I tried my best to keep the characters in character even in the world I created.

I can not express how dark and gruesome this is, even if it is not necessarily shown in the first chapter. People will die, they will be eaten, and their deaths will be graphic.

However I wanted to make the romance as pure and honest as a could, even with how manipulative the two are. The path to that love will be bloody and filled with angst.

I hope you read it despite the strange premise, and I hope you like it.

Ossa

Will Graham knew many things in this world, more than anyone else could possibly know. Of course, there were also many things he did not know, like who he had been before he woke up in a world that should not have existed.

One day Will Graham had been a normal child, and on the next everything had changed. He had gone to bed as a child, and he had woken with the knowledge of a man.

Everyone, from his father to the servants, had believed it was due to his mother leaving. In reality, Will hadn't cared the slightest bit for a woman he couldn't remember. He was more concerned with the other things he did not understand.

He couldn't remember much about the man he had been, only snippets of memory, things a child should never have seen. Scenes filled with blood, murder, and twisted minds haunted his dreams, while doubts about reality often filled his waking moments.

Two of those memories were far more vivid than the others, they consumed his mind and followed his every moment.

The first he was certain was the death of who he had been before he woke as a child. He often had dreams of a fishing line wrapped around his throat, of his flesh slowly tearing open, his lungs aching for air, the spots that filled his vision as his face began to tingle and go numb before everything just ceased and fell into black.

He did his utmost not to dwell on it.

The second memory was of a book, a tragic dark romance novel that he must have read at some point in his past life.

It was the most vivid part of his memory.

The Raven of Bones was the story of a young woman named Alana Bloom, the daughter of a prominent Earl in the Kingdom of Lithuania. She fell in love with Duke Hannibal Lecter during her first Courting Ball. Hannibal, a war hero of royal blood, had been just as taken with the woman.

Their love was not easy, the story was filled with all kinds of obstacles. Jealous women, errant magical powers, competitive suitors, and of course a villain known only as The Chesapeake Ripper.

Lithuania was a world full of magic and monsters, where even the lowest noble had extraordinary powers. The most common was the ability to control an element, less so were the powers over light and darkness, and even more rare was the ability to summon strange and powerful creatures. Of course, there were other powers, powers of the mind, but only those of royal blood could hope to have them.

Most people had dominion over one or two types of magic, allowing clever families and people to create entirely new types of magic and powers.

Abilities had a tendency to be hereditary, noble families were often known by their magic as much as their standing. Selective breeding and marriage were commonplace, but marrying for politics or love were not seen as wrong.

Alana Bloom was special, by merit of being the protagonist. Her family was known to control light and earth, giving virtue to their legacy of growing and commanding plants. While Alana was perfectly able to use her legacy, she was born with a third power.

She could summon a being of light, a beautiful Kirin called Agne.

A summoner had not been born in nearly five decades and it had taken the social world by storm. In the book Alana was always depicted with her Kirin at her side. The beast was pure white, in both scales and fur. Its single horn was described as being made of diamonds and its eyes were green as sweet grass.

Alana caught the eye of many, for her beauty and her abilities, but she had her heart set on Hannibal.

Hannibal was powerful, in both standing and magic, his grandfather had been the former king's younger brother, though by the time the book began the dukedom was only Hannibal and his little sister Mischa.

Hannibal was known to have power over darkness and fire, magic he used to raze the battle field and decimate enemy armies. The royal family never worried about how powerful Hannibal was, certain in his loyalty.

This leads to many other conflicts in the book, and Alana eventually uncovers a conspiracy to overthrow the king. The villain, The Chesapeake Ripper, controlled the underground and was known for his cruelty and cunning. Many believed the man to be a monster who ate his enemies and had the blessing of a dark god.

Many murders, disappearances, and all sorts of wicked things were said to be done by the Ripper.

It was once the book set up the confrontation between the heroine and the villain that things took a twisted turn.

Alana finds out that the Ripper is none other than Hannibal Lecter, her finance. Throughout the book Hannibal had been operating in the background, controlling the board and setting himself up as future king. Alana only finds out because Hannibal wanted her to, and a bloody battle breaks out.

Of course, Hannibal prevails after showcasing his true magic, killing the entire royal family and saving Alana till the very end. The broken and battered woman could do nothing, looking one last time upon the man she loved.

The book took a sudden shift to an outside perspective and tells of Hannibal reverently turning Alana into beautiful art and eating her heart the night he is crowned king.

The reason this memory was of such importance to Will was simple. The world he woke into was the Kingdom of Lithuania, the setting of the book. He had even woken up as one of the side characters in the story.

William Graham was the only son of Viscount Graham, a family of moderate power. They were known for their powers over water and their love of ships. His mother had been the daughter of a lowly Baron with unknown magic and had been forced into an arranged marriage she never wanted.

Once Will had been born she had left to live in her fathers home, never to be heard from again.

In the story William Graham was a minor antagonist, a foolish and awkward boy who fell in love with Alana at first sight. His only crime was his naive and pushy personality. He never gave up on Alana, growing desperate and obstinate in the face of her love for Hannibal.

It came to a head during a ball when he snapped and poured wine on Hannibal's slacks. Alana of course stood up for her lover with righteous fury and William was publicly humiliated. The next time he appears in the book was as a corpse, displayed like the finest art in a winery, at the hands of the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will knew that simply existing in this body would change at least his part of the story, and he endeavored to be of no interest to the social world, lest he get overly involved with the tragedy of the future.

He learned about ships from his father and he trained hounds in his free time. When he turned ten and discovered he had a magic he should not have, he didn't tell anyone.

Empathy was a magic of the mind, and he was certainly not related to the royal family, unless his mother was keeping very damning secrets.

The power was easy to hide but it made coexisting with others difficult. He could see and become the mind of anyone he made eye contact with, and that path led to the horrors he often dreamed of.

He stopped making eye contact, wore fake glasses, rarely went to any social events, and he made sure to keep to himself.

Despite his best efforts he had one reluctant companion.

Beverly Katz, the daughter of a Baron with little interest in politics.

She was determined to be his friend, and he didn't care enough to turn her away. She was open and blunt in a way most people weren't and being around her took away the sharp edge

of other’s minds. She had fire magic, but it wasn't strong, just enough to make life a bit interesting.

He never told her of his empathy and she never asked, even when it was obvious she knew he was hiding something. She went so far as to become a buffer from the other noble children their age when she understood he was different.

He was thankful.

Things changed again when he was sixteen and his father died out at sea. The shock was enough to awaken a power he most certainly should never have had, one that was more damning than even his empathy.

He could summon a creature, a being he had never seen before. It told him it was a Ravenstag and it made a pact with him by sharing its name.

His Ravenstag was beautiful.

It was as large as any horse and its inky coat was covered in sleek feathers that seemed to absorb the very light around them. Upon its head was a crown of black antlers, larger than any stag he had ever seen. Its eyes were as black as the rest of it, staring out at the world with grim intelligence.

The Ravenstag was known to him as Belial, a name that marked their bond from now until the end of his mortal life.

Belial never left his side after that day, living in his shadow when he was around others and simply roaming his manor when it was just them and the hounds.

Will had fired every servant under his employ when he became Viscount, keeping only his butler and his groundskeeper. Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller were both aware of Belial, but Will had no doubts about them telling another soul.

Loyalty to his family and fear of his power was enough to seal their lips, besides that, he paid them far more than any other noble would bother. He was thankful for their work and they seemed to enjoy the quiet of the manor as much as he did.

He managed to spend ten years after his father passed in relative peace, ignoring the many rumors that spread in high society about his reclusive, rude nature and scruffy appearance.

His peace was broken when the king, his majesty Jack Crawford, personally declared that all nobles of eligible status would attend the Courting Ball.

The Courting Ball was a ball that happened once a year, a place for nobles to mingle and court each other, though many married couples also attended. It was different than a debutante, in fact very few nobles under the age of twenty were invited due to the nature of the ball.

Will had managed to avoid the ball for the past seven years, but he could not avoid a summons from the king himself.

The only explanation for the strange decree was that the story from the book was about to begin. Alana and her power would be the only reason the king would want every eligible noble in attendance, either as a suitor or to showcase Alana's magic. It was even more likely to be the story, as the queen was with child, and would not be in attendance.

The only thing Will could do was keep to himself and stay far away from Alana and Hannibal.

"You could at least try harder to clean up, this is an important ball after all."

"I'm wearing nice clothes, that should be more than enough."

Beverly couldn't help but sigh as she looked at her friend. Despite Will being a Viscount, he rarely showed himself in society, and he certainly didn't care about whatever fashion was popular at the time.

It had been painful enough to get him into proper clothing, even if it was as casual as he could manage. She knew she would never get him to shave his facial hair, just as she was never going to convince him to wear a waistcoat or style his hair.

Frankly she was surprised he was willing to put this much effort in, but she figured it was in hopes he would stand out a little less. Will seemed to believe it was his rude and off putting behavior that drew the attention of others, but she knew better.

While his personality was gruff and his wit was sharp and scathing, there was undoubtedly something alluring about him. He was above all handsome, one of the most handsome men she had ever seen. His curls were dark and his eyes were like looking into a stormy sky, not to mention how fit he was compared to many other noblemen.

Beverly knew of many young ladies and lords who coveted Will for his looks alone, but more than his beauty was his very presence. He had an aura that both drew people in as much as it made them wary of him.

No one who met him could question his power, she was certain his magic was more potent than even the kings, as treasonous as the thought was. That power and mystery made people want to be close to him, to bask in his wild and unrestrained magic.

It was also the very thing that made people avoid him. His magic felt heavy and dark, like ink. It wasn't a bad or even negative feeling, but it made it feel like his magic could swallow you whole and drag you into the abyss.

Added to how he avoided eye contact and always seemed to know far too much about those he spoke to, it made him a very intimidating figure. Beverly had the advantage of getting close to him when he was young, before he became so powerful. As far as she was concerned, he was still the frumpy boy who always played in the mud with his hounds.

She knew this ball was the last place he wanted to be, but she couldn't help but be excited by the prospect. Will hadn't shown his face in public for five years, and he had only grown more powerful and handsome in that time.

No one would be able to slander her friend now, not even that hag Freddie Lounds. Will was going to take the ball by storm and she was certain her friend wouldn't even notice.

Best of all though were the other two guests that Beverly knew would be there. This was the first ball that Duke Lecter would be attending since he came back from war. She couldn't wait to see him again, she remembered him as a poised and cultured man, easily one of the most attractive and powerful people she had ever seen.

He was at least nearing his fifties, but age meant little to those with powerful magic, they could live for hundreds of years if they so wished. Contrary to his age she knew the Duke was a fit and powerful silver fox, his looks often swaying both men and women.

Along with the Duke, this would be the very first Courting Ball that Lady Bloom would be attending. It was the talk of the town, so to speak. Alana Bloom was the flower of high society, with her refined looks and unique magic. There was a rumor that the Lady had summoned a creature, something that hadn't happened for a very long time.

Beverly could only hope that Lady Bloom would be willing to show off her summon at the ball. It would be amazing to see such magic before her eyes, and it would be just as amusing to watch everyone else clamor for her attention.

Before all that though she had to make sure her friend was ready, she was determined to make him just as eye-catching as the Duke.

“It's almost enough, we really need to at least brush that rat’s nest you call your hair, and we need to get you cologne that doesn't have a ship on the bottle.”

It was easy enough to ignore her friend's indignant huff and throw the brush at his head.

The ball was as horrible as he thought it would be.

Beverly had left him almost as soon as they had arrived to go mingle with her other friends, leaving him to stand alone in a corner with a glass of wine.

He couldn't help but find everyone he was familiar with.

Freddie Lounds, the daughter of a Viscount, was wearing a blue dress that showed entirely too much flesh and contrasted badly with her red hair. Freddie single-handedly ran the entire gossip network in high society, and she had a nasty habit of dragging Will’s name through the mud.

Count Frederick Chillton looked just as much like a peacock as he always had, and Will couldn't help but be amused by how much the man was sweating as he looked around the ballroom, no doubt waiting for Hannibal to show up.

Lord Franklyn Froideveaux was standing alone and stuffing his pockets with cheese, glancing nervously at the tall and dark man beside him more than once.

Lady Margot Verger was talking to a group of ladies. Will only recognized her as being Alana's best friend in the books. Her brother played a much larger part than she did, and it was unlikely the man would show up at the ball.

He noticed Lord Mathew Brown skulking about like a creep, and Marquess Francis Dolarhyde standing equally alone.

Francis was a man Will wanted to avoid as much as Hannibal. The man was Hannibal's right hand and closest confidant. No one knew what his magic was, but Will was very aware of the dragon wings that adored the man's back and the dark personality that lurked just below the surface.

There were others he knew at the ball, but his attention was stolen when Alana Bloom was introduced.

Will could admit that Alana was beautiful, and the creature of light walking beside her made a very striking image. Her gown was made of red silk, the color was deep as the blood she would one day be covered in. Her dark hair flowed free around her shoulders and she walked with purpose, all gentle smiles and secretive eyes.

Will could see why so many fell for her at first glance, but he found her to be lacking. It was hard to be attracted to someone who walked to their own doom and couldn't see the monster by her side. Alana was nothing more than a beautiful pawn in a game being played by a man far stronger than anyone could hope to be.

He felt the faint brush of Belial's amusement and disinterest at the sight of Agne. Will had the distinct impression that the Ravenstag far outclassed the Kirin in power and was taking great pleasure in it.

Will felt his own amusement watching many of the people in the ballroom flounder and flock to Alana like ants, everyone falling over themselves to talk to her while trying to uphold common manors. Beverly seemed less interested in Alana herself, and far more interested in the Kirin, looking at it with wide eyes.

Would she have a similar reaction to seeing Belial? Or would she take one look at the Ravenstag and cower in fear? He had no intention of ever showing her, but the thought crossed his mind.

However, all thought soon left his mind when he felt Belial's sudden and intense attention move towards the entrance.

The man who walked in took his breath away, as much as his presence made his heart stop in cold dread.

Hannibal Lecter walked in like he owned the place, his steps sure and carefully controlled. The book had done a truly poor job describing the sheer presence and elegance of the man

now dominating all attention.

Ashy dark blond hair was styled impeccably, maroon eyes barely this shade away from red, muscles that could be seen under his clothes, and a passive, if kind expression on his face. Sharp cheekbones and a unique kind of attractiveness. He was the picture of grace and refinement, even if his clothes were a tad eccentric in color and pattern.

Truly, his person suit was perfect. There was nothing to give away the violence and evil Will knew was lurking under his skin. It was so much so that he almost doubted himself, if it wasn't for Belial's heavy attention on the man.

He watched as Hannibal greeted many people, a secretive kind of smile on his face. Eventually he made his way to Alana, who already looked besotted with the man. There was a blush high on her cheeks and she was hiding behind a fan as she spoke to him.

Hannibal seemed to speak to her as he had with everyone else, and he only spoke with her for so long. Will knew that once the dancing started he would be the first to ask her, but at the moment there were still many people to greet.

Will stayed in his corner, and he was certain he would be able to get out of the ball without any kind of incident.

His hopes and dreams were shattered into a thousand pieces the moment he felt eyes on him.

He looked up from his wine, his eyes widening at the sheer intensity that the maroon eyes were staring at him with. He made the mistake of making eye contact, and felt, nothing. It was blessedly silent, enough so that everyone in the room just faded away.

Hannibal seemed equally as affected, his person suit slipping just slightly to let a heady darkness and curiosity fill his eyes.

It was like time was standing still, until the peace once again shattered.

He felt the brush of Belial's apology and his excitement before the Ravenstag flowed from his shadow, forming beside his shoulder like a shadow and shaking his head, the light reflecting off his large antlers.

The room steadily went silent, and all eyes were soon staring at him and his summon.

He wanted to run.

The sight of such wild and atramentous magic nearly took his breath away. He was ashamed to admit he had not noticed the bearer of such exquisite power at first, his attention on the young Alana and his plans for her.

Then his eyes had been inadvertently drawn to a man standing alone in the corner with a glass of wine. The man was bewitching in both looks and magic, even with the fake glasses and scruffy dress.

It was even better when the man looked up and made eye contact with him. He felt the gentle push of the man's mind against his own, something he had never felt before in his long life. It carried with it such darkness and broken pieces.

It was indescribable, the sheer presence of this man.

It was made more so when the shadows around the man flowed like water and the largest Ravenstag he had ever seen formed beside the man, he could feel the creature's joy and possessiveness towards his summoner.

Never before had one summoned the symbol of his house, it was the last thing he expected.

As the room grew uneasy and the whispering began he let himself take a moment to ponder this alluring puzzle the world had presented him with. Even as the man, Viscount Graham if the whispers were believed, fled from the ballroom with his summon at his side, Hannibal made changes to his plan.

Alana Bloom was beautiful, and useful in his future plans, but Will Graham would be a pleasure to get to know.

Nothing would be more fulfilling than to look into the mind of one as unique and powerful as the man, especially due to the fear the man had initially looked at him with. He had no doubt that dear Will had seen some part of his mind.

A new game was just beginning, one he planned to win.

Corda Rossa

Chapter Notes

I hope you like it.

Roman Fell was a man of few words. He had a beautiful wife, a pleasant job, and he was lucky enough to be born with a bit of magic. While it by no means made him a true Noble, it allowed him to live a life of quiet luxury.

He worked at the largest library in the capital, maintaining and mending the books for Nobles to come to peruse at their leisure. Along with his position in the capital, he had the utmost pleasure of being on the King's side.

High society was split into three factions, Loyalists, who served the king and believed in his heir to be. Supremacists, who advocated for another member of the royal family and did not believe in the Queen's ability to bear a child. The third were neutral, staking a claim with neither side.

Roman was proud to say he was a Loyalist and he strived to use what power he did have to forward the faction's goals.

Things were going much better now that the Queen was with child, the tide was turning swiftly to their side. The road would be bumpy, but he could see the goal growing near. He did what he could to provide knowledge for those that sought it, and to sway public opinion for his faction.

While most commoners did not understand how the politics of Nobles worked, public opinion was still very important to any ruler, and nothing would be better than the public advocating for the Queen’s child.

It was with a light heart and sound mind that he returned home. He couldn't not wait to see his beautiful wife Lydia.

Unfortunately, he knew something was wrong the moment he saw his front door.

It was open and the lock looked to be shattered. He rushed inside without nary a thought to what could be inside, his meager wind magic swirling around his hand. The main room was empty and the house was silent.

He rushed into the bedroom and froze at the sight before him.

His wife lay on the bed, naked and slowly bleeding from a gaping gash in her stomach.

Above her stood a thing of nightmares, an Abomination, a creature straight from the pits of damnation.

The creature was tall and ill-proportioned, its arms were longer than its entire body, bent at the wrong angles and twisted at the joints. Long, wicked claws as thin as glass tipped its largely grotesque hands, one of which was dripping with bright red blood.

Its body was emaciated, he could see every bone that was protruding from its ebony skin. The skin itself looked stretched, opaque and like leather, peeling off in large swashes and showing putrid white flesh and muscle that dripped a viscous black liquid.

The creature was hunched over, barely fitting inside the room. It had a large crown of black antlers adorned with bright red berries and small purple flowers. The Abomination's lower half was like that of a hare's hind legs, if the legs were twisted around and backwards. What he could see of its feet were large and clawed like its hands, half steeped in the shadow of the bed.

The devil spawn slowly turned to face him and Roman felt his heart stop.

Its eyes, its eyes were like that of a mans. While their color was of drying blood and rich soil, they were perfectly human, if bloodshot with veins that seemed to have burst. The cold indifference in which the devil regarded him was in direct conflict with the wicked smirk that made itself home on its gaunt face.

The smirk was filled with gleaming white teeth, sharp like knives and far too large for the wide mouth containing them. Black viscus ichor was slowly dripping down the side of its mouth, running down its chin and neck, to pool in the hollow of its collarbone.

Caught as he was in the things abominable glory, he was too slow to react when the creature twitched, its limbs jerking like a puppet before, with a speed he could not follow, it grabbed and tossed him to the bed beside his wife.

Roman had no chance to struggle before the sickly, cloying scent of ripe berries and decaying flesh overcame his senses, his limbs going limp and heavy. Try as he might, he could not even twitch his fingers, but every brush of his clothes against his skin felt like sandpaper.

He was unable to even look towards Lydia, even as he heard the small whimpers that continuously escaped her.

All he could do was stare at the nightmare leaning over him, watching as the monster procured a massive spool of thick red string from the shadows. Those cold, cold eyes looked upon him impassively before turning to his wife. All he could do was close his eyes, to wish away this moment, while the sound of her screams echoed around the room.

After what felt like an eternity the screams tapered off into nothing but ragged wet breathing.

Roman wanted the madness to end. He wanted to know what brought this demon to his doorstep, what curse was thrust upon his family. He just wanted to know why, but his mouth would not move, no sound could escape behind his teeth.

He wished the thing would just kill them, end this ceaseless torture.

Like it had read his thoughts he heard the sudden tearing of cloth and felt the cold air on his over sensitive skin, it felt like falling into a frozen stream, so painful it was almost like shards of glass.

In a matter of seconds he was disrobed, as naked and vulnerable as his wife, bare and helpless to the devil above him.

Thin claws slowly ran up his chest and over his neck, stilling over his lips, the pinpoints unnaturally warm against his flesh.

He could only open his eyes and stare at the monstrous fingers that dwarfed his face and watch as one sharp claw dipped just below his sight and pierced his lip. The pain was sharp and sudden, almost bearable when compared to the tugging that came just after.

The action was repeated twice more before it dawned on him, the thing was sewing his lips together.

There was not a single God to pray to, no one to hear his pleas, and no amount of trying could move his limbs.

Roman Fell could only lay on his back and suffer every pinprick, every moment of string being pulled through his torn flesh. His mind drifted, darkness filling the edges of his thoughts, ignoring as his body was pulled, tugged, and forced to move however the creature wanted, like a doll.

It was either a very long time, or only moments, when it dawned on him he could no longer hear his dear Lydia's breath.

He hoped, for that was all he had left, he hoped and prayed she was dead, gone from this suffering, this indignity, this anguish.

His head was soon gently turned to the side. He could only gaze upon the glassy, dead, empty, eyes of his wife.

The eyes were all he could look at when a deep, searing pain engulfed his chest, accompanied by the sound of bones snapping and twisting.

His dear, sweet Lydia was the last thing he wanted to see when he left this mortal realm.

And like magic, soft sweet darkness overcame his mind and he gratefully fell into nothing.

The house was silent and cold. Jimmy had been sent on a short vacation the moment Will returned from the disaster that was the courting ball, so no one at all walked the halls.

It had been nearly a week to the day, and Will was feeling no better about what had occurred.

His ire at Belial had faded for the most part, it was nearly impossible to be upset at the stag when it walked around like a beaten dog. It was manipulative, but he supposed his summon would be just like him.

Of course, that didn't mean the Ravenstag had gone unpunished. No, Belial was lucky enough to spend three entire days confined to a wardrobe, with nothing to stave boredom and no one to interact with, not even the hounds.

It was the worst torture Will could think of for the clingy attention whore.

Will knew his partner was sorry, but not repentant, and no force was going to change that.

Through the course of the week Will only had one visitor. Beverly simply showed up, shoved a basket of food into his arms, gave him a hug, pet Belial on the snout, and left. It had been singularity bewildering and somehow the nicest thing she could have ever done.

She didn't ask questions, she didn't demand an explanation, she hadn't even been upset with him, only worried. She seemed absurdly pleased to pet the Ravenstag, and Will had the pleasure of hearing her whisper to his summon that he was far more beautiful than a Kirin.

He always thought Beverly was akin to a storm, and the way she came into his life and left him just as quickly only proved his point.

Will was thankful she was his friend, even if he was likely a bad friend himself. He swore at that moment that nothing on his earth was going to hurt her, and any who tried would have to deal with him.

While the food had been helpful, it didn't really fix what had happened.

In one fell swoop he had been outed as a Summoner, caught Hannibal’s eye, and brought an end to his ability to be a hermit.

There was nothing he could do to change it, and already Freddie Lounds was writing articles about him. Lucky for him, even if he couldn't fix it, he could control what was to happen next.

The King would want to use him, from this moment on he was involved in the book, but he did not have to follow the story. While he knew this world was from a book, that made it no less real. People could change, events could be manipulated, and life went on.

There was no way to stop the King using him, but he could use the King in turn.

Alana was many things in the book, but there were things she couldn't do. She was a force to be reckoned with, but she was often arrogant in her ability and unwilling to gaze too long into the darkness. This made her far more useful as the powerful poster girl for the King, and less useful when it came to the dark underbelly.

Will had no such qualms.

He was the only person in this world who knew the truth about Hannibal Lector, and he planned to keep it that way. He knew who he was, and more importantly he knew *what* he was. He had no intention of stopping the man, but he would not roll over and be killed for his cause.

Ironically the safest place for Will now that he had been outed, was investigating the Chesapeake Ripper killings. He could use the protection from the King, and he could learn more about the underground. Plus, he would be in a position to lie about anything he wanted, no one knew what to do with the killings and would believe anything he told them.

Will may have known the story, but it could change at any moment. This way, he could keep an eye on what Hannibal was truly up to and not just the mask he showed the world.

Best of all, he had no doubt that King Crawford would soon call him into action. The first Ripper killing would be found almost a week after the ball, and Alana was summoned to investigate it. She did not have the stomach for it, and quickly gave the duty to the knights.

He had no doubt that he would be summoned right alongside her, in light of new developments.

Will could no longer hide away, but he could at the very least control how he was involved, and he had every intention to do so.

He had survived his own mind, this would not break him.

With his plans in mind, six days after the ball, he made himself ready. He bathed, trimmed his hair and his beard, and put on clothes he didn't mind getting bloody. His glasses would ensure he wasn't overwhelmed, and Belial could walk beside him as he always wished to.

At seven in the morning, right after he had gotten ready, his predictions were proven correct.

A messenger of the King appeared on his doorstep, with a letter and a carriage.

The man had been startled by his appearance, but professional enough not to speak on it, simply ushering him out of the house and to his next destination.

The letter was simple, informing him of a gruesome murder and his that his presence was requested. He would be meeting the Captain of the Knight Guard, Garret Jacob Hobbs, and Lady Alana Bloom outside the scene of the murder.

Meeting Hobbs would be interesting. The man was one of the sub villains of the story, he was caught kidnapping and eating girls that resembled his daughter Abigail. While he was known as a Barron, he enjoyed being a knight almost as much as he loved his daughter.

Alana, with Hannibal’s help, had discovered his dark deeds and killed him in the fight soon after. She had taken in Abigail, thinking the girl was nothing more than a victim traumatized by her father, never once seeing the snake that lurked behind the girl's eyes.

The Hobbs family possessed earth magic, magic they used to become mighty hunters and knights, but Abigail didn't inherit only the magic of earth, by chance she had also awoken the

magic of darkness, the same attribute Hannibal possessed.

The girl had been swayed to Hannibal's side with honeyed words and the promise of all the human flesh the little cannibal could want.

She had gleefully given her life for Hannibal and died for his cause, never once feeling remorse for Alana.

Will did not yet know what he would do with Abigail, but now that he was forced from his hiding, he would do something about Hobbs. The man was killing innocent young girls, girls who had done nothing to deserve such a fate, and Will wouldn't allow the man to continue for long.

His musings were interrupted when the carriage stopped.

They were standing outside Pilies Street, the part of the capital where wealthy commoners lived. A small crowd had gathered, and as he departed his carriage he could see Alana and her Kirin standing beside a balding man in red and silver armor.

Three sets of eyes turned to him in unison as Belial formed beside him, his head held high and his black antlers gleaming in the sunlight.

He ignored them even as he walked towards them, his eyes firmly set on the quaint little house before him. Roman Fell and his wife Lydia lived here, the first victims of the Ripper. One of the few who were killed not for being rude, but for being in the wrong political party.

Due to Hannibal's penchant for killing mostly those he found rude, the political killings had been easily hidden under all the rest, giving no real pattern to the murders. The public would come to believe that the killings were caused by bad luck or a curse, while the Knights would come to say it was a deranged man in a dark covenant with a God.

Of course, no one was correct.

Hannibal was in no way deranged, and he was free from any kind of bargain with a God.

"Ah, Viscount Graham, it is nice to finally meet you."

He turned to look at Hobbs as the man spoke, making sure not to make eye contact with the man. His voice was oily and unpleasant, the kind smile on his face seemed wooden.

"Barron Hobbs, Lady Bloom. Can we get this over with?"

He let his eyes drift over to Alana. The woman was beautiful, she was wearing a simple gown with a white blouse and dark blue skirt, her thick hair caught neatly in a low ponytail. She had an honest, if polite, smile on her face.

Agne and Belial were having some kind of staring contest, both were large, but Belial was a head taller than the Kirin, and his antlers only made him seem bigger.

Hobbs cleared his throat and gestured to the house.

“It’s bad in there, I’ve never seen anything like it, I would never have asked a Lady to see such a site, but the King asked that you both take a look.”

Alana’s smile turned a little forced and she ran her hands down her skirt before walking towards the door.

“You don't need to worry about me, Sir Hobbs, I am well equipped to deal with whatever has happened here.”

Will didn't disagree, Alana was a strong and powerful woman, but this would be her first time seeing death. She, like anyone else, was not able to handle the site she would see this day. It was a defining moment in her character growth throughout the book. In the end she would be able to see hordes of corpses and not blink an eye, but right now she was a sheltered Lady who had never seen the darkness.

As such, Will didn't stop the offended Lady from walking into the house and towards a truly gruesome site.

He simply followed after her, glancing around the clean house and noting Hobbs didn't come inside, likely anticipating how quickly Alana, and presumably Will, would run out of the house.

Will only looked back at Alana when he heard her cut off cry, walking up to her and stepping in the doorway beside the shocked and pale woman.

The room would be immaculate, simple and clean in a way that spoke of quiet wealth, if not for the bed in the center. It was soaked with drying and congealed blood, turning the entire thing a dirty brown color. Upon the bed was a couple, Roman and Lydia Fell.

They were completely naked, embracing each other as lovers would. Their dead flesh was adorned with bright red string, binding the two together permanently. Every bit of skin that touched the other was sewn together, the string like beautiful embroidery to tie them.

Both Roman and Lydia had their mouths sewn shut. While Roman’s chest was opened like a gaping flower, Lydia’s stomach was slashed open, her guts spilling around her like a morbid skirt.

All around them were small purple flowers and bunches of tiny red berries.

His breath caught as he stared at the site. He couldn't help but find it stunning how much care had gone into each detail. A loving embrace to send them off into the next life. Every limb was in the perfect place, every cut was smooth and neat, the stitching was more beautiful than he had ever seen.

These people had not been rude, their death was for a purpose, so the least he could do was elevate them in death, let them be together forever. They were worthless, but at the very least they had been good people. A loving, hard working husband, and a kind, sweet wife.

Their only crime was following a false King, their ignorance, their undoing.

Alana turning and running from the house brought him back to himself. At some point he had walked halfway into the room and he hadn't even noticed.

He couldn't let himself get lost in whatever Hannibal left behind of himself. That was a dangerous path he would not return from. Hannibal was not to be trifled with, his mind was a twisted hellscape.

Will would need to tread carefully, but for now he had an assessment to make and a knight to appease.

It was more than he could have wished for.

Hannibal loved when things went his way, and this day was a wonderful example of reaping the rewards of good planning.

He knew that fool Jack would send the two Summoners to see his latest kill. They were not the only ones summoned, Jack had asked Hannibal to look over the dead bodies, to see if it was an enemy Kingdom.

It was impossible for Jack to fathom such darkness in his own Kingdom, and that suited Hannibal just as well.

When he got to the house he was graced with the enchanting image of a distraught Alana running from the house, tearing running down her pale face, her Kirin was right at her side. She had not appreciated his work then, it was obvious. But that was fine, not everyone had a taste for his art.

He hurried over to her side, pulling out a red handkerchief and handing it to her. He was not prepared for her to throw herself into his arms, but it was just as well. She was sweet and innocent, unable to comprehend the horrors she had just seen.

“It is okay, my dear, I am here now. You won’t need to go back inside.”

“It was horrible! There was blood everywhere and they had been mangled! How will their souls be put to rest now?”

“A priest will read the rites, they will pass on as any good people do. You don’t need to worry about them, it will all be okay. The Goddess accepts all into her arms.”

Even as he gently patted her back, he could only stare at the door, waiting for the other Summoner to stumble from the house. Hobbs was beginning to look uncomfortable, shifting on his feet. The man likely didn't want to see the room again, but he was equally unwilling to leave a Viscount alone.

To Hannibal’s unending surprise and genuine pleasure Viscount Graham walked from the house, looking no worse for wear. His face was not even pale and there were flakes of blood on his shoes.

He could do nothing but drink in the exquisite sight of the man. He was more put together than he had been at the ball, his current clothes suited him. Dark slacks, a gray button down shirt, and a long black coat, simple and yet it did not take away from his sturdy and toned figure.

His hair was just as curly, but he had at some point taken off his glasses, his stormy eyes taking in everything around him with a shrewd expression.

His Ravenstag was at his side, the magnificent stag only adding to the dark cocktail of power that surrounded the man. The knights around the house all shifted back slightly, even Hobbs himself. The man would certainly know darkness when he saw it.

When Will Graham looked upon him and Alana the world came to a quiet stop, the woman in his arms barely a whisper in his mind.

Will Graham knew.

There was no doubt in Hannibal's mind. Those stormy eyes looked at him with *knowing* , made all the more staggering when the man simply turned away in complete indifference.

This man who seemed to appear out of nowhere knew it was Hannibal, and he did not care.

What else did the alluring little creature know? How much did he *see* during the ball?

Hannibal wasn't nervous, he had no doubt that Will Graham wouldn't tell a soul, but he was curious, what would the man do with his knowledge?

Even as he turned his eyes to Alana and wiped away her tears, he could only think of Will.

He would need to host a dinner soon, and he would be certain to invite both Alana and Will, to congratulate them.

Lunae Lumen

Chapter Summary

I hope you like it.

“[redacted], you know, I never wanted to kill you. I once believed the two of us could take on the world. [redacted] and [redacted] against the universe! But no, you had to go and spit on our efforts, my efforts. I was going places! Then you had to come and ruin everything with your self righteous idealism.”

His chest was burning and the room around him was hazy and spinning. He couldn't move his fingers and he could barely keep his eyes open.

He never thought [redacted] would betray him. His brother meant the world to him, he had done everything in his power to provide for them, to give them a better life.

Was this what he deserved? Is this what he got for killing [redacted]’s lover?

He didn't think so. He had done the right thing, the good thing. [redacted] was the reason he became a cop in the first place, was the reason he was shot and ended up learning the truth that day in the hospital.

He wouldn't change what he had done, he didn't regret it. [redacted] betrayed him first, he had dug his own grave and no amount of flowery words or manipulation would change that.

He wasn't going to survive this day, he knew it deep in his bones. His body was broken and his mind was soon to join it. He wasn't sad or heartbroken, he was filled with rage. Unfortunately he was past the point of taking [redacted] with him, he no longer had the physical ability.

He tried to open his mouth, to spit out the vitriol words choking his throat, but only thick red blood spewed out. He had no doubt his broken ribs had punctured his lungs. [redacted] had been thorough with his punishment.

His home was ransacked, burning in the distance. His pack was slaughtered one by one before his eyes, not a single dog survived. He had been beaten to an inch of his life, hanging on by his own will and [redacted]’s desire to see him suffer.

“You brought this upon yourself, Brother. I would have given you the world, if only you had trusted me.”

He could only groan as his head was lifted and pulled back by his hair, feeling something thin wrap around his throat and catching the blurry sight of a bright green lure. [redacted] planned

to kill him with his own fishing wire, end his life with a shadow of their childhood, hours upon hours spent fishing in the creek.

He would laugh if only he could.

He refused to die as a beast and firmly met [redacted]'s eyes, eyes just as stormy as his own. He would never forget this moment, no matter what afterlife there was. If they ended up together in hell, then he would be first in line to watch [redacted] freeze in the depths of Lake Cocytus.

[redacted] *held him close as he tightened the wire, a final embrace between brothers.*

He never broke eye contact, not as his face began to tingle, not as he felt the wire slice his flesh and his warm blood ran down his chest. He didn't look away until the darkness took him.

Will woke with a gasp, covered in cold sweat. His limbs were shaking and his head ached. It took a moment for his lavish room to fill his sleep-addled vision.

He had not had a dream of his death in years.

He could never recall names or faces, just small details from the world around him. He had no idea who the man was, the one who called him brother, but he could vividly recall the rage and agony he felt as he died.

The memories haunted him.

Memories he could only barely remember, memories he had no proof were real. Was it perverse to wish such gruesome dreams were real? Was it wrong to take solace in his own murder?

If the dreams were real when Will would know for certain this world he lived in was also real, and not a figment of a broken man's psyche.

A world borne from a book, or a book borne from a world. The very idea was preposterous, insane, delusional, but it was the world Will found himself occupying. He could do nothing but hope it was real and continue moving forward.

Speaking of moving forward, Will had a mandatory luncheon to attend.

The King himself was holding a memorial party for Roman Fell and his dear wife. Of course only Nobles were welcome. It was nothing more than a poorly veiled attempt to show the King still held power, even after the ghastly and untimely murder of one of his closest supporters.

Most could decide if they were to attend, but Will and Alana had no choice. They were the ones investigating the murder, and they were the only two summoners currently in the Kingdom.

In the book the luncheon was a garden party, it was a place for Alana to steal the spotlight and improve her relationship with Hannibal. It was also the first time the readers were introduced to two of Duke Lector's closest companions.

Count Antony Dimmond, public leader of the Supremacist faction and a real Casanova.

His public facade did wonders to hide his true nature, Antony was ruthless when it came to blackmail and he could shut up even the most powerful players. He manipulated both men and women, using their affections to gather information and set them on a more suitable path.

His magic suited his endeavors just as well, he had dominion over fire and air, making him not only a powerful opponent in battle, but a true showman and seducer of the highest caliber.

Antony fought beside Hannibal during the war and was given a fraction of Hannibal’s secret in return.

Along with Antony Dimmond was Madam Bedelia Du Maurier.

Bedelia was the daughter of a prominent Marquess, but she had made her own way in life, staying unmarried and opening a high class Brothel.

Lupanar was one of a kind, a den of opulence and debauchery like no other. Only Nobles or wealthy commoners were allowed entrance, and Bedelia ruled with an iron fist. No one was to speak about the going ons outside of the brothel, and offenders were silenced. Its discreet and classy atmosphere made it an ideal escape for men and women alike.

Bedelia herself was a supporter of Hannibal Lecter, but it was only on the surface. Bedelia, of all people, knew what Hannibal truly was. There was no escape for her, and the one time she tried to leave him she lost a powerful client and her own leg.

In the book she did her utmost to become close to Alana, bonding over their shared light magic. The Madam had almost succeeded in showing Alana the truth, but her untimely death kept Alana firmly in the dark.

Beside the two of them one other person of importance was introduced, Abigail Hobbs. Her part at the memorial was short, but it was an important moment for her father, painting the moment he would realize his daughter was now a woman and would soon be leaving him.

Frankly, Will didn't want to go.

The entire thing was sold as a memorial, but it was just a den of politics and lies. He chafed at the idea of being a show pony for the King, but he had no choice.

He was going to be surrounded by people he didn't like, in clothes he found uncomfortable, and play a game he thought was foolish. The very idea made him want to punish Belial again, it was the stag's fault in the first place.

The worst part though, the thing that got under his skin the most was the gift he received the day before.

Hannibal Lecter had taken it upon himself to provide an outfit for both himself and Alana. Will could choose not to wear it, but that would be a social faux pas. Will personally didn't care about manners and etiquette, but he didn't know what Hannibal wanted out of it.

Did the man want him to wear it, or did he want to see Will go in his own clothes? Nothing was ever simple with Lecter, everything was a test or a game. He had no idea which way it would go, so he would simply choose neither path.

He would wear his own clothes and use the accessories the man had gifted him. Will had to look his best while meeting the King for the first time after all.

He chose a black silk double breasted tailcoat with an equally black waistcoat underneath. They would match the accessories gifted to him quite well.

A simple black lace cravat with a delicate silver brooch inlaid with obsidian adorned his neck, while a black single-shoulder cape topped with silver wolf fur went over his left shoulder. Plain black gloves and dress shoes were also provided.

Will didn't bother to do anything to his hair, simply brushing it and letting it go where it may. He also grabbed a pair of black framed glasses, unwilling to be unprotected around so many people.

Belial did not escape unscathed.

In a moment of petty desire Will tied a silver silk ribbon around the stag’s neck and hung delicate silver strands from his antlers. All in all Will found it to be quite comical, but if he was forced to dress as a peacock, then his partner would suffer the same fate.

The last thing he did before leaving was compile his ‘notes’ on the murder investigation, certain the King would personally ask about it. While Will wouldn't dare expose Hannibal, he refused to be seen as incompetent.

It wasn't until he was in his carriage on his way to the palace that he remembered the last important guest that would be in attendance. Mischa Lecter, Hannibal’s little sister, the one known to be cursed never to grow up.

Mischa was forever nine years old, it was common knowledge that Mischa was cursed many years ago by her own mother, in an attempt to protect her from foreign soldiers who attacked their territory. Will didn't know how such a curse would protect anyone, but the public readily accepted the story.

Hannibal had never been able to break the curse, and she rarely showed up in society. When she did she was always treated well and no one was willing to gossip about her, lest they insult the Duke.

Will was suddenly cold at the thought of meeting her.

He wanted nothing to do with Mischa Lecter. He didn't trust that he could treat a walking corpse as a little girl.

Abigail knew the party was a memorial in remembrance of the deceased, but she couldn't help but be excited.

While she may be nineteen, she had never gone to any event besides her Debutante. Her father was overprotective, afraid some young nobleman would come and woo her heart. Lucky for Abigail he didn't have a choice this time. Her mother decided it was time for her to go out and make connections.

This would be her very first time meeting the King, but she was most excited to meet the Duke. She had heard about his many deeds during the war, and she was honored to have the same magic attribute as a war hero.

While darkness was not as rare as light, it was difficult to handle and hard to mix with other magic. Darkness was the embodiment of the void, it could devour everything around if one was not careful. If light was life then darkness was the inevitable death.

It could swallow up heat and create ice without the use of water, if one was talented enough they could even control shadows, but only the Duke was known to possess such talent.

He was doubly impressive for finding a way to mix fire magic with his darkness! She heard tale that he could create a freezing purple flame, capable of burning forever. She would love to see the fire in action, no doubt it was both beautiful and elegant.

Her own darkness was nothing as grand as that. So far she had only ever been able to use her magic to blind and deafen the animals she would hunt with her father. It was nifty, but she didn't think it was as glorious as cold purple fire.

Abigail could admit her earth magic had grown weaker due to her constant practice with her darkness, but she didn't mind, moving dirt was nowhere near as amazing as moving shadows.

In an effort to look her best she had gone all out, her mother gave her full blessing. It was a party for mourning, so one must wear black, but colored accessories were perfectly welcome. Her dress itself was black with navy blue embroidery. She made sure the dress tastefully showed off her assets, she wanted to catch attention after all.

She adorned her dark hair with luscious blue flowers and chose silver jewelry with beautiful sapphires.

She was glad she wouldn't be seeing her father until she reached the venue, there was no way he would accept her current outfit.

The ride to the palace was excruciatingly long, she could barely keep still. She would get to meet her hero! She didn't think anyone else would meet Duke Lecters standards, not even the rumored beauty of Lady Alana Bloom.

Lady Bloom was all the papers could talk about, her and Viscount William Graham. Lady Bloom was said to have light and earth magic, giving her dominion over creating plants and

healing the wounded. Abigail wasn't jealous at the Lady's ability to mix the two magics, light was simpler than darkness after all.

While she was interested in seeing the Lady's pure white Kirin, it was nowhere near her excitement in meeting the Duke.

The papers had much less to say about Viscount Graham. The man was an enigma, a social hermit that suddenly appeared with a summon of his own. The papers said he was the exact opposite of Lady Bloom, but Abigail didn't quite know what that meant.

As far as she understood no one actually knew what magic he had, just that his family was known to have dominion over water. No one had ever actually seen him use magic before, so no one had any clue. A few articles even speculated that outside of his summon he didn't have any magic.

He didn't sound very interesting, but the articles did say his summon was a Ravenstag, the magnificent beast on the Lecter coat of arms. Abigail loved deer, and stags with towering antlers were her favorite. She wanted to see such a magical being with her own eyes, so hopefully the Viscount would be attending today.

In her excitement she was one of the first to arrive at the palace. She was led to a beautiful sprawling garden. Red roses, blue hydrangea, purple snapdragons, pink dicentra, and dozens of types of flowering trees everywhere the eye could see, and even a huge hedge maze seemed to tower beside the venue.

Glass tables and exquisite chairs speckled a large stone paved clearing, fountains and strings of fairy lanterns gave life to every corner. It was like walking into the setting of a fairy tale, it was all absolutely breathtaking.

Taking the flute of pink champagne a servant brought her she found herself a table for one, it was positioned to see the entrance but it was out of the way enough for her to be nearly hidden. She had seen her father standing guard in his armor, and she wanted to avoid him as long as she could.

Her position gave her the perfect chance to watch the older Nobles enter and speak to each other. It was the best passtime while she waited for Duke Lecter to appear. She didn't personally know many of the Nobles in attendance, but that didn't stop her from judging them by her own standards.

One woman who caught her eye was Madam Du Maurier. Her father had called the woman harlot and always told Abigail to never follow her path. Seeing her for the first time shattered the image of a decrepit old woman, replacing it with a goddess.

The woman was aged, but all the more beautiful for it.

Her blonde hair was caught in an intricate bun, loose strands falling and framing her face in elegant curls. Her dress was simple and black, in a style known mostly in the east, a single button holding the top closed. A shiny black mink fur stole was wrapped around her shoulders, Abigail wanted to touch it, just to see if it was as soft as it looked.

What really caught her eye though was the Madam's leg. Her black dress had an scandalous slit on the side, it reached nearly to her hip. It allowed everyone to see the carved ivory leg she had in place of flesh.

Somehow the woman was able to walk in heels with only one leg being real, and she was completely unfazed by the whispers of the women around her, or the covetous stares of some of the men. She walked like she owned the place, her head held high and her steps confident.

Abigail thought she was beautiful.

She was so taken with the Madam that she almost missed Duke Lecter entering the venue, if it had not been for the whispers she would not have noticed.

The Duke was more than she could have ever dreamed.

Tall and imposing, the Duke exuded an air of power and serenity. He wore a black military uniform of the highest rank, the ceremonial black outfit was decorated with silver chains and purple gems. In his right hand was a black cane with a silver top she could not quite see the shape of.

On his left arm was a woman in a long elegant black dress, her thick hair was tied to the side and her bangs framed her face, bringing out her bright blue eyes. Delicate red flowers wrapped around her neck, while white flowers formed a belt around her waist and adorned her hair.

Beside her was a pure white beast, a Kirin, that was similarly decorated in red flowers. Abigail almost thought it looked like blood splatter on snow, but the image was too pure for such a comparison.

Abigail had to admit that Lady Bloom was truly a stunning woman, but something about the image she made with the Duke was just wrong. She couldn't put her finger on it, but it seemed very showy, like making a statement more than anything else.

She almost missed the little girl standing beside the Duke in her musings.

The little blonde girl really stood out. She was wearing a white dress and white shoes, she looked like a little angel. She was clinging to her brother's leg, shyly gazing at the people around them. She was adorable!

Abigail had heard she was cursed to forever be a child, but she wasn't quite prepared for it. It was pitiful in its own way, though the girl seemed happy for the most part.

In fact, she was the perfect excuse for Abigail to talk to the Duke.

Taking a deep breath she stood. She had to be confident, but she couldn't be overbearing. She just had to go over and ask the Duke if he needed help watching his sister. It was that easy.

Every step towards the Duke made her heart beat faster, she was sure her cheeks were red. She nearly stopped when maroon eyes turned in her direction, but the man didn't seem displeased by her approach, he even gave her a small smile.

Bolstered by his acceptance she hurried her pace, stopping a few feet from the Duke and Lady Bloom. She curtsied and then smiled, getting a dazzling smile from Lady Bloom and a shy peek from Mischa.

“Good day Duke Lecter, Lady Bloom. I am Abigail Hobbs, daughter of Barron Hobbs.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Lady Hobbs. Can we help you with anything?”

The Duke’s voice was deeper than she originally imagined, but it was warm and open.

“I was hoping I would be able to show Lady Lecter around the flower garden. I thought she might find adult conversation to be boring.”

“Indeed, you are correct. I think Mischa would quite enjoy a walk around the garden with a Lady as lovely as you.”

Abigail could feel her ears grow warm, she had to look away from the Duke for fear that her heart would burst from her chest and escape. No one had called her lovely before, and for the Duke to be the first meant the world to her.

She opened her mouth to reply when the people around them suddenly hushed, the silence was nearly oppressive in its suddenness. She glanced up and saw the expression on the Duke’s face had frozen into something like awe, his eyes were bright and unblinking.

When she looked for the source of the silence she couldn't help but gasp. The man walking into the garden was like night had taken human form. She barely had words for the image before her.

The man, it could only be Viscount Graham, was the most alluring human she had ever seen. He almost transcended what she believed could make a mortal. While his looks were magnificent, they were not what made him stand out so much.

His outfit was entirely black, only the silver around his brooch and the gray fur on his shoulder had any life, they were like stars in the night sky. His hair was messy and his eyes were obscured by glasses, but even she could tell his features were pleasant. She imagined he would be even more breathtaking without his trimmed beard, but it certainly took nothing away.

Walking beside him was a grand Ravenstag with the most glorious crown of antlers she had ever seen. Delicate silver hung in graceful streaks, adding more to the image of stars in the night. Its coat of raven feathers shone in beautiful iridescence in the sunlight, giving off hues of blue and purple.

None of that could compare to the air of power and darkness the man exuded. It was overwhelming in its splendor. He was on par with the Duke, Abigail could envision the two men standing side by side, controlling a room with their presence alone.

She glanced again at the Duke and felt hot at the expression on his face. He was watching Viscount Graham like he wanted to eat him. It seemed he was dressing the man down with

his eyes, slowly taking in every detail.

He most certainly did not have such an expression while looking at Lady Bloom.

Deep in her heart Abigail made a decision. The only one worthy to be beside the Duke was this man made of night and stars.

Hannibal had never met a being as captivating as Will Graham.

While he was hoping Will would wear the clothes he had chosen, he was amused to see that the man was only wearing the accessories. It was clever, and it clearly showed how much the man saw in Hannibal.

He would have been insulted if the man hadn't worn his gift, but he could admit he would have been disappointed if the man had simply worn the outfit without a single complaint.

He wished more than anything that the man wouldn't wear the ugly glasses he seemed so enamored with, but alas, he could only wait for the right moment to get rid of them.

This party was the perfect place for Hannibal and his companions to scout out the Nobles, and he believed Will would be a wonderful tool to use when speaking to the King.

While the Queen was with child the world of the Nobles would be in a constant state of flux, it was the best environment for Hannibal to work. It was the only reason he had enabled Bella to have a child.

While he would keep up his work, he decided he would finally meet Will Graham, he ached to have a conversation with the man. He wanted to know more about him and how his mind worked, and what secrets he was keeping behind his stormy eyes.

He felt his teeth growing behind his lips and had to draw his thoughts away from the man. He wanted to talk to him, to touch him, and most of all he wanted to taste him. His flesh and blood must hold such exquisite power, but this was not the place for such thoughts.

Before he spoke with Will he must bring Abigail firmly to his side, one with such darkness would make a very fine tool. He needed someone who could watch Alana at all times, and the soft, naive girl would be perfect.

With one last glance at Will Graham he looked back at Abigail, noticing the look of wonderment she was giving Will.

It seemed like would always call to like.

Domini Salutem

Chapter Notes

> I hope you like it. I'm sorry Hannibal doesn't have a pov this time, the narrative took its own turn.

Being the head of the royal Knights was an honor, an honor Garret wore with pride. He could take pride in being a Baron, but that was not his own effort. He strived for more, and slowly he worked his way to the top.

If asked for loyalty, he would show it. If asked to bow to a higher power, he would bend in a heartbeat.

Ever since he was young he had a fascination with higher beings, the Gods and creatures that roamed the world in secret, or even lived in another plane. When he was out hunting he felt like a God, he felt connected to the world in a way he could never explain.

Nothing swayed his heart the way power did.

Many Nobles felt power was simply the strength of their magic or their family standing, but he knew better. Power was deciding whether another would live or die.

As a hunter he chose the fate of his prey. As a Knight he chose the fate of the humans around him. That was true power, that was true control.

He imagined that transcending humanity had the same kind of power. He admired those with strength, those that could reach higher than he himself could. He did not resent them, he simply stood in awe, intoxicated by their ability.

He became a Knight for power, he became a hunter for pleasure.

With every kill he made, he was sure to honor those who died for him, nothing went to waste in hunting. Flesh and organs were eaten, bones and hair were used for crafting, and a small portion would go to those that roamed the forest unseen.

He married only because he was expected to. He did not love his wife, but he was kind to her. He knew she would never understand him, so he acted the perfect husband in her presence.

When he was blessed with a daughter his world changed. Never before had he loved, never before had he felt such a stirring in his heart.

Abigail was beautiful.

She was clever and sweet, she understood him in ways he never thought could be possible.

She took to hunting like a fish to water, she took to his craft like she was born for nothing more.

Of course, it was hard for her at first. It took time to teach her how to honor her kills, how to show deference to those beings more powerful. Once she understood, once she began to see the world as he did, he finally felt complete.

Things changed as she grew into a woman.

It started with her debut into society. It was the first time he truly noticed how much she had grown. She was beginning to mature, she was drawing attention from mere insects.

He refused to give his daughter away to such pests, so he kept her close to home. He knew his wife did not approve, but he did not care. Abigail was safer at home, away from those that would deflower her.

He hid her away for three years, but he knew he could not hide her forever. The time he would have to give her up was drawing near.

In his darkest moments he would think about how much better it would be to honor her, to help her become something more. He could eat her heart, he could give her to those in the forest, he could make sure she never left.

She could become something more, something pure and beautiful.

The thought of losing her forever was the only thing that stayed his hand. As his mind grew darker, he began looking for a solution.

He found one, but he was under no haste to enact it.

He could use a substitute, he could use his power and honor Abigail by consuming those that had even a fraction of her beauty.

He was wary of going down such a path, he knew the Kingdom was sitting on the edge of a knife. He would have already gone down the path if it was not for Roman Fell's untimely death.

He was not the one sent to investigate, he was simply ordered by the King to watch the two Summoners.

When he met Lady Alana Bloom he was certain the murder would never be solved. She was soft, untested, a Lady who had never seen bloodshed. The Kirin by her side did not sway his heart, it was not like the Gods of his forest, it was tame and fragile.

He did not have any hope for Viscount William Graham either. The young man was a hermit, rumors about him were far from savory. There was even a rumor that his mother ran off because she could not bear to look upon the shame she brought into the world.

Rumor said he had no magic, a disgrace to his noble house.

The man he was presented with was like nothing he could have ever imagined.

A young man, not even thirty, with glass eyes that held a storm and a darkness that permeated the world around him. Viscount Graham would have been perfectly at ease in the forest, he had the power to walk among the Gods and beings.

The summon by his side put the Kirin to shame.

The Ravenstag was magnificent. A crown of antlers like he had never seen before with eyes like the darkest void. The beast was a killer, a predator waiting to strike.

As he watched the man slowly walk from the gruesome murder scene, calm as could be, he knew the King was a fool.

His Majesty King Crawford was courting death itself.

He did not see the Viscount again until the memorial for Roman Fell. The man was walking forward to greet the King, and naturally as Captain of the Royal Knights, Garret was by the King's side.

It was by sheer chance he happened to look beyond the Viscount to see his daughter standing in the crowd.

Abigail was glorious, dressed in black cloth and blue flowers. He could no longer deny she had grown into a woman, he could not help but see the many pests that gazed upon her with covetous eyes.

He knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that if he did not kill the image of his daughter, he would kill Abigail to keep her with him forever.

He turned when he felt a shiver flow down his spine, his eyes meeting the Viscount’s by chance.

His blood froze in his veins.

Blue eyes, as empty and deep as the abyss, bore into his own.

Garret knew he was going to die.

He did not know when, but he knew this man was going to kill him.

He did not relax until those unfathomable eyes turned away from him and bowed to the King.

Meeting the King was arduous, it was a test of his patience.

Jack Crawford was not a bad man, nor was he unkind, he was simply ignorant with a penitent for being overbearing. He was staunch in his beliefs, and he felt the path of justice was worth any price.

In the book he had used Alana more than even Hannibal had, sending her here and there to fix this problem and that. In the end, after his wife and child passed on, he sent her to the battlefield, the place she would meet her death at the hands of her love.

The King was by no means a weak man, but his power was paltry in the face of Hannibal's abilities. Betrayed by his right hand, the battle for the throne lost, Jack did the last thing he could think of, he killed himself.

He refused to give his death to the monster that devoured his Kingdom, his last act as King was to thrust a poisoned blade into his own heart.

Will admired the man's tenacious attitude, but he didn't quite like the man in person.

It may have been because Will was still shaking off the vestiges of Hobbs mind, but he felt that Jack Crawford was weak, not a coward but a righteous fool. It was difficult to hide his sneer, to greet the man with the reverence his station afforded him.

He should not have met Hobbs' eyes. The oily feeling on his mind still slicked across his own. Hobbs was a man possessed, willing to do anything for the only love he felt deep in his soul. No one was good enough, no one but his daughter and the beings he saw as Gods.

The man would have made a wondrous priest, if the Gods he worshiped were not considered lesser or demonic by the Temple.

The Temple of Pale Light was the only unified belief in this land, Jack Crawford himself was a devout practitioner. The figure known only as The Pale Goddess, a deity that gave humans the power to protect themselves, was worshiped far and wide.

No one disputed the existence of other deities and beings, but none had given so much to the human race. For a Noble to publicly announce their own faith, if such a faith was different from the Temple, it would be blasphemous.

That is not to say no Nobles worshiped outside of the Pale Light, it was simply never spoken about. This was especially so as King Crawford wanted to unite the Kingdom under one faith.

Instead of fighting it, or publicly rebelling, everyone simply kept their own faith in private. What the King did not know wouldn't hurt anyone.

The irony was not lost on Will, the King's own Royal Knight didn't care for the Pale Goddess, and his right hand, his closest family member, was as blasphemous as one could be. It was truly a wonder the Kingdom didn't fall apart sooner.

Will himself had no faith, none such as the people around him did. He knew, as almost no one else could know, the origin of many of the Gods and Devils. He did not feel the need to

worship a being as imperfect as himself, no matter what power they could give him.

As it was, no being was more powerful than Hannibal, and that was simply a fact he had to live with.

If only Hobbs had known a God, as cruel as nature itself, walked in his very midst.

He wondered in what ways Hannibal would use such a fanatic, how he would dispose of him once his usefulness was over. It made him feel slightly better about the oily muck in his brain, but he quickly tore himself away from such a fantasy. Will would be the one to kill Hobbs, to keep the man from killing many innocent girls.

Will did not view himself as righteous, or even morally sound, but if he could stop the perversions of such a depraved man, he would.

He was lucky in the end. The King had barely any time to speak to him, his attention taken by Alana when the woman came to greet the King, her bright Kirin by her side.

She was as beautiful as always, but Will knew Hannibal had given her the outfit she wore with such pride. It was surprisingly simple when compared to what Hannibal had given him, and the fact that Alana wore it without question made him feel uncomfortable, though he could not name why.

Taking the chance fate had graciously given him, Will grabbed a glass of whatever alcoholic drink was being supplied, and ignoring the gazes he could feel crawling along his back, he ducked into the hedge maze.

It would be rude to leave before the mourning was complete, but there was no reason for him to mingle with anyone. He knew for a fact that no one but Beverly would be truly interested in him, and he had no patience for putting on airs.

He was more likely to insult the entire Noble society than to meet someone he would enjoy talking to.

Besides, Hobbs was still haunting his mind, like the ghost the man would soon be.

He and Belial wandered deeper into the maze until they came upon an old fountain pond. Worn stone benches circled the fountain, and colorful Koi fish swam in the algae filled water. It felt different here, it didn't feel like a place people often stumbled upon.

He held his hand above the water, calling onto the magic deep within himself, and watched as an orb of clear water formed just under his hand. He used it to wash the grime from a bench before sitting.

Belial laid beside him, setting his large head in Will’s lap.

He was used to such a thing, idly petting his velvety snout as he stared at the fish in the water.

It was peaceful, enough that he was nearly able to rid himself of Hobbs and all the many feelings of the people around him.

He wished, not for the first time, that he could simply stay in such peace forever. To sit by a stream and fish, his hounds and Belial at his side. To sail the ocean in a boat he built himself, finding lands without the farce that was society.

To be alone with his thoughts, to be free and flow where he wished. Such was his dream, his end goal, his reason to persevere through his current predicament.

For one, beautiful, heartrending, moment Will Graham let himself be.

He must have closed his eyes at some point, startling violently when Belial suddenly moved his head. Will blinked and looked up, only for his heart to freeze at the sight before him.

Mischa was standing just before him, looking ashen and ghostly in her white dress. Her lips moved into a facsimile of a smile, her eyes crinkling in an expression of childish delight. Her blonde hair glinted like gold in the light, her sweet face and dimpled cheeks made her look like a precious angel.

Will knew better, he knew what she was, and yet he could not stop himself from looking into her pale brown eyes.

Hollow emptiness gazed back at him, there was no light in its mind, no feelings and no soul. His mind was filled with spiders and cotton, cold chills began to wrack his body, his joints ached, his tongue was thick and heavy.

He wanted to look away but he couldn't, his sight filled with pale brown and dead, dead, dead flesh.

“Well now, I wasn't expecting you to be so talented.”

The moment shattered like glass, his lungs filled with air he had forgotten to breathe, and his eyes met brown of a different, bloodier shade. He would feel horror at meeting Hannibal alone with a puppet made of flesh, but Will could barely feel anything at all.

The man was standing behind Mischa, his hand on her shoulder as he gazed at Will with something akin to understanding, if only the look had not been edged with something sharp.

Like the two times before he could feel nothing from Hannibal, as was silent and peaceful. He hated himself for taking solace in the emptiness. He cleared his throat and stood, barely bowing his head in greeting, using his glasses to hide his gaze.

“Duke Lecter, what a surprise to see you here. I would have thought you would be mingling with your fellows.”

“I had been, but Mischa ran off on her own. I was simply looking to bring her back. I thank you for finding her.”

If Will had been ignorant, if he hadn't known what stood before him, he would have simply thought the smile on Hannibal’s face was charming. The smile was small and secretive, likely inspiring the feeling of being in on a private joke, like there was something special between them.

But Will did know, and that knowledge made the expression all the more sinister. It was knowing, he had no doubt Hannibal knew what Will had seen in Mischa. He was afraid of what that knowledge would mean for his future, but that didn't mean he was going to come out and admit it.

“I am glad you were able to find her without trouble.”

Will knew his tone was rude, a dismissal. Hannibal hated all things rude, he was hoping the man would lose face and leave. A future murder attempt was entirely preferable to a polite conversation filled with blades.

He was not prepared for his smile to take a softer edge, nor for the man to stalk closer. Mischa simply stood in place, as still as the death she came from.

“It seems I have found something else instead, have I not Lord Graham? What brings one such as yourself to hide away in this maze, do you fear what you must see in the eyes of another?”

Will kept his face blank by sheer force of will, if he flinched it would be over, it would be his loss. He would persevere, if only for his pride.

“I apologize Your Grace, I do not know what you mean. I simply wished to explore the maze with Belial, he is not fond of the attention he receives.”

His heart was beating hard, both in fear and exhilaration. He was blatantly lying to Hannibal Lecter, a person who could destroy him without a thought.

He watched as Hannibal turned to Belial, his expression becoming one of fondness.

“It has been many years since I have seen a Ravenstag, they are secretive beings and they rarely make themselves known. It makes it all the more astonishing that one would design to be summoned, to make a contract with a mere mortal.”

Hannibal’s eyes became sharp and predatory, his gaze piercing into Will like a knife.

“Are you a mere mortal, Will Graham?”

Will was nearly struck dumb at the look, keeping his wits by sheer determination. Hannibal was using magic of some kind, though Will could not fathom what kind, it felt like pressure in his mind, it was not a thing he could comprehend. He was able to reply despite every word feeling foreign and heavy.

“I am sorry to disappoint you, I am but a man of flesh and bone. It was simply luck that brought Belial to my side, nothing more and nothing less.”

Hannibal’s ever present smile grew and Will could just barely see the sharp teeth behind the man's lips. He seemed more amused than anything, taking a step into Will’s personal space.

Thankfully for Will’s waning sanity a loud female voice suddenly filled the space around them, breaking the strange standoff they were having. Hannibal’s face was wiped of all

expression, before his usual smile took over and he stepped back.

Will took the chance to hide his face in Belial's neck, the large stag standing slightly between them. To no one's surprise Alana rushed up to Hannibal, Will did not bother to look at her, but he could hear the confusion in her voice.

"Hannibal! I was looking everywhere for you, why are you hiding out in the maze?"

"I apologize my dear, Mischa ran off from Lady Hobbs and I was searching for her. I am lucky Lord Graham found her before she became too lost."

"Oh, I see. It is fortunate she was found so quickly. Thank you, Viscount, for finding our dear Mischa."

Will could only bring himself to nod, not caring for the rudeness of the gesture. If he looked at them he would lose it, and it was not the time to have a breakdown. Not here at the Palace, and certainly not in front of Hannibal.

There was a pause where the other party obviously waited for a reply, but when none came they both gave their farewell. Will couldn't resist peeking out and watching as Hannibal walked away, his sister at his side.

Screw propriety, he was going home before he ran into someone else.

Garret was prepared.

Abigail was home safe, he was thankful no degenerates had gotten close to her during the garden party. She had spent most of the time with Duke Lecter and Lady Bloom, watching Lady Mischa. Viscount Graham had left early, and Garret would be lying if did not admit to the relief he felt when the younger man was gone.

Night had long since fallen and he had begun his hunt.

Sarah Olsen was the daughter of a simple shop owner. Garret had seen her by chance during one of his patrols. Though her beauty was nowhere near Abigail's, he could see his daughter in the shades of Sarah's hair and the blue of her eyes.

He knew the girl would be home alone this night, her father away for business.

It was simple enough to hide in the shadows and reach the house, the back faced the edge of the woods. He was about to cross the tree line when the hairs on his neck stood on end, instinct told him he was no longer alone.

He turned to look behind himself, only for his breath to freeze in his lungs.

He could just barely see the silhouette of a large, dark stag. Moonlight glinted off of its fur in shades of blue and green. Beside the imposing stag was none other than Viscount Graham.

The man was dressed in a long, dark coat and simple black clothes. A low top hat kept his curly hair at bay and he was without his nearly ever present glasses.

The dark aura around the man was different, free and wild in a way it had not been earlier in the day. The man walked closer, the stag matching his stride.

Garret wanted to move, wanted to turn away and run, wanted to summon up his domain and protect himself with his magic. However, he couldn't bring himself to move, couldn't even bring himself to speak.

When Will Graham walked past a shaft of moonlight Garret had seen death in his eyes. Even if he ran he would not get far. This man, monster, god in human flesh, was going to kill him. He had seen inside the depths of Garret's mind and had found him wanting.

"Good evening Garret Jacob Hobbs. I believe you know why I am here."

"You are here to kill me."

The words felt torn from his throat, leaving him raw. To his dawning horror Will simply nodded, his expression never once changing from grim blankness.

He watched as the man simply raised his hand, magic pooling around them in gentle waves. It was barely a moment before he felt a soft burning in his lungs, causing him to hack and cough.

When water spilled past his lips, burning his chest and throat on its way up, he was confused. He could not give the strange phenomenon much thought as he began to cough more, his chest heaving.

The more water that spilled past his lips, the less he could breath, until there was nothing but water and his burning lungs.

He clawed at his chest, his throat, his mouth, trying to alleviate the burning in vain. He tried to run, only to find himself on the ground. Water continued to bubble forth as he desperately turned his attention to the god before him.

Will was watching him with a completely impassive expression. He could see how little he meant to the creature before him. His death meant nothing, his life even less.

Black spots began to cover his vision, he could no longer feel his hands, had no idea if he was moving his fingers or not.

As the world started to fade in and out he watched the stag step closer. One moment it was far away, and the next it was closer. He tried to make a sound as the great beast leaned down and opened its maw.

Sharp, sharp white fangs above his face was the last sight that greeted him before the darkness whisked him away.

Will stared at the body before him without truly feeling a thing. He watched Belial gorge himself on the bloody flesh, thankful the Ravenstag would eat everything, even the bones.

The soft snap of a branch drew his attention away from his summon, his eyes gazing deeper into the dark woods around him.

A monster he had only read about stood a mere few feet away. It was tall and ill proportioned, dark flesh stretched over bone, a massive crown of antlers so similar to his summon, covered in flowers and berries.

He knew the twisted thing before him. His heart pounded with fear, but also something akin to wonder. He was surprised at how evenly he managed to speak, his eyes never moving from the abomination he knew better than anyone else in the world.

“Hello again, Duke Lecter.”

Quaerimus Corda

Chapter Notes

> I hope you like it. If there are any issues with my writing for the second half of the chapter, please let me know. I finished this chapter while I was both very tired and very sad, so I'm not sure of the quality.

Hannibal was beginning to believe Will Graham was not as human as he appeared.

Oh, he believed dear Will thought himself human, but it was becoming apparent he was more than a mere mortal.

His flesh was that of a human, even if it was certain one of his parents belonged to the royal line. Magic of the mind was not something one could just be born with, and as the former Viscount was most certainly not of the royal line, that left his mother.

If he remembered correctly Arabella Bates was the only child of a poor Baron. The Bates family lived on the outskirts of Dainava Forest and rarely interacted with the Nobles in and around the capital.

Arabella's marriage to a Viscount caused quite a splash, but it was nothing Hannibal had any interest in. At the time he was taking care of his own efforts with the war and had little time to bother with who married whom.

Their eventual children were of more importance to his plans.

This though, the mere chance that Arabella was connected to the royal line was something he would need to look into. He would not have put it past an older generation of his family to have had an illegitimate child and hidden them away in some far part of the Kingdom.

Hannibal had made certain that he and Jack were the last of the royal line, but the thought of someone slipping through the cracks was invigorating.

As interesting as it would be if Will truly was a royal, it was not what drew Hannibal to him.

His soul was not of this plane, it was not even like the gods and devils that populated this place. He had not noticed before, but after seeing how Will reacted to Mischa he was certain, Will Graham had died.

He could not explain how the soul of a dead man had entered a living body, and he could not be sure if Will himself was aware of it.

The darkness of his aura, his amplified abilities, being able to Summon a Ravenstag of all beings, it all pointed to the nature of his soul. Many men had tried to return a soul to the living world, but it always ended in failure.

The Pale Goddess was diligent with her position as a Psycopomp, and she never left a soul to wander for long. Necromancers, desperate humans, curious beings, and even those like himself, who only sought to know, had tried many ways to revive the dead.

Hannibal had only been eight when he first dabbled in necromancy.

His dear Mischa had been killed and crassly turned into a simple stew, meant to feed a group of traitorous scum hiding in his family estate. His parents had long passed, killed by Vladis Grutas, the leader of the group.

His domain had been powerful, commanding an unheard of three elements, earth, water, and air. Hannibal's parents, as powerful as the Dukedom of Lecter had been, were no match for the man and his group of miscreants.

The man had taken Hannibal and Mischa captive, hoping to fend off whatever Imperial Guard may have come. Unfortunately for Vladis and everyone left in the Estate a terrible snow storm blew in. Being so far north had been both a blessing and a curse.

While the Estate could keep them warm it could not keep them fed, after two months they ran out of food. As the men grew desperate and anxious, Vladis quickly found a solution to their imminent deaths.

After all, they only needed one hostage, and a girl could not even be considered a spare heir.

Hannibal did not witness his sister's death, perhaps it was meant to be a kind of mercy to a small powerless boy. He did not watch his sister die, but he did watch as her body was carefully bled, skinned, and butchered.

Nothing of the small eight year old girl went to waste. Her organs, her flesh, her skin, and her blood were all used to make a perpetual stew. What was not used right away was stored in the cold winter outside. When the stew became low they would add more meat into the ever cooking pot.

Only her hair, teeth, and bones were left.

Hannibal Lecter partook in the meal that his dear sister provided. He savored every bite of the bland and bitter stew, he left nothing of her to waste. Her death provided him with life, and he swore that life would never belong to another.

During that storm there was much idle time. He did not delude himself into believing he could kill a group of grown criminals, so he spent his time learning.

He read many of the books his father had previously hid from him. One such book involved the taboo of necromancy.

While Hannibal did not regret consuming his sister, he did regret that he could not save her to begin with. He was weak and lacking, his own magic had not yet bloomed. When he saw that he might have his sister back, when he saw that one silver ray of hope, he grasped it with both hands.

Vladis and his men often left him alone as long as he did not try and escape, a form of suicide on its own. He had ample time and ability to collect everything he needed to bring his sister back.

He collected her hair, her bones, her teeth, and a simple piece of her flesh from the stew. He grabbed candles, a small knife, and coal with which to draw.

He made an intricate circle, a gate to another realm. He surrounded that circle with burning candles. He gently arranged his sister's pieces in the center. He bled his own arm and recited the words he read with diligence.

In the end he did get his sister back.

Her body formed from that circle, whole, healthy, and living. She could move, talk, and even learn, but in the end she was nothing more than a doll made of flesh and frozen in time. There was no soul, no spark, nothing that had belonged to his sister.

That didn't matter to Hannibal, not in the least. He hid her away from the men, he spent his time reading aloud to an empty doll, truly he could only be thankful that he was no longer alone in the harsh winter.

Eventually the storm passed and the Imperial Guard was able to reach the Dukedom.

Just as he had planned Vladis was able to use Hannibal as a hostage, forcing the King to allow him and his men to cross the Kingdom’s borders and to freedom.

The day his family’s murder was let free, the day the King betrayed him, the day that long winter ended, was the day Hannibal’s magic awoke.

Darkness, fire, mental magic that gave him absolute control over his own mind, and a powerful Summon.

At that moment Hannibal had decided that he would be the last one standing. The heads of Vladis and his men would be his, the Kingdom and everyone in it would belong to him, the Gods themselves would tremble at his feet and weep.

The taboo of necromancy became nothing but a meager parlor trick to him.

Hannibal began to accumulate knowledge with a fervent lust, he consumed the hearts and minds of the strong, and he feasted on the flesh of those he found to be mere pigs.

He started a bloody war and claimed the heads of his enemies, he planned and he hoarded, he made sure he had control of every piece on the board. While he could not account for the nature of the humans around him, it simply added to his enjoyment of the game.

He would give his Kingdom true enlightenment, he would bring them forth into a new age, he would give them knowledge and power they could not hope to understand, and he would watch as the world was consumed in the beautiful chaos and torn at the seams.

And yet, in all his meticulous planning he had not foreseen something like Will Graham. The soul of a dead man residing in a body with unquestionable power and an appetizing allure.

Never before had another being lit such a fire in the depths of his being, never had he seen someone squander their power and stifle their very being to such a horrific extent as the dark haired man.

Will was undoubtedly the most magnificent being Hannibal had ever seen, but he was like a bird with clipped wings. The man looked at Hannibal and knew what he was, but Hannibal could only look upon Will and see his vast potential.

He did not yet know if he wanted to consume the ethereal being that was Will or if he wanted to take him under wing and teach him all he knew. Would it be fair to consume him while he was nothing more than a seedling?

After he spoke to Will amongst the flowers blooming in that maze he knew that whether he ate the man or allowed him to run free, he would need to let Will reach his true potential.

No matter what end Will forged for himself, he at the very least deserved to reach it with his full and complete power.

Hannibal did not fear Will.

No matter what the man knew, no matter how strong he would become, he would never manage to surpass Hannibal, for Hannibal was The Crawling Chaos. Eater of Gods, Keeper of Knowledge. Will would never have teeth large enough to take a bite of his flesh.

Content in his decision, he continued with his plans.

That night he had no plans to kill, but he did wish to see what kind of monster Garret Jacob Hobbs would become. The hunter had been drawing closer and closer to a very twisted and fulfilling path, and Hannibal had wished to witness his becoming.

Imagine his surprise when he discovered someone had moved before Hobbs ever had the chance.

Will Graham clothed in dark fabric, an equally dark Ravenstag at his side, had single-handedly rid the world of Hobbs. Hannibal had not yet known what element Will could command, but water had been a pleasant surprise.

His serene expression, his body filled with indifference, his creative and skillful execution, it was a heady concoction, like the finest wine.

He knew the man had a darkness, but he had not thought Will was already so adept in murder. He did not even flinch as his Ravenstag began to eat Hobbs' body, bones and flesh.

The confident being before him was nothing like the closed off and awkward man he was in public.

When Will slowly turned to face him, his expression never changing even as he took in his true form, and spoke the words that would admit his knowledge, Hannibal came to a very startling conclusion.

Will did not regard Hannibal as a human. He had never once seen him as anything more than the beast he kept concealed under his skin.

And oh, did that realization burn.

Alana was in love.

When she was nothing more than a little girl she would dream about a handsome prince meeting her outside her bedroom window. He would be kind, courteous, and above all he would be loyal. He would be so perfect that her father wouldn't have a single negative comment about him.

They would have the most wondrous wedding. Everything would be pure white and the entire kingdom would give her their well wishes. She would kiss her prince and they would ride off into the sunset, to see worlds far beyond her bedroom window.

She had grown out of that dream the day her magic awoke and she summoned Agne. It was nothing bad, or even negative, she simply had to spend all her time studying, not daydreaming about a prince who was certainly too perfect for this world.

She was only twelve when she first summoned her Kirin. Agne was as large as a mare, she was truly magnificent with her pure white scales and her smooth silky fur, her horn often drew the attention of many people and in the beginning people would mistakenly call her a unicorn.

For Alana though, her favorite part of Agne was her bright green eyes. Those eyes never looked at her and expected anything. Agne didn't care if Alana did nothing with her life, or if she had dreams of grandeur. The Kirin was her very first friend, and she would always hold her summon close to her heart.

Because of her powerful magic and her own personal genius, adults expected many things of her, even the King himself. She studied, and studied, and studied some more.

Magic, history, politics, sword fighting, and etiquette. Her days were tirelessly filled with activities and learning.

Because she was a girl she was expected to always look her best, to never have a hair out of place, to never step out of line. She hated being judged for her gender, but she couldn't do anything about it. Instead she embraced what people expected of her and would go far beyond what they thought she could do.

Unlike most young women, Alana did not have a debutante ball. While she did often associate with others her age she never did anything that involved the social circle of the Nobles. The King wanted to make sure that Alana could take care of herself and the people around her to the best of her abilities, and she strived to make the King and her family proud.

Her first true step into the world of Nobles was a Courting Ball. She was aware the King was using it as a means to show off, to show the Nobles the power he held through Alana, but she didn't mind. She spent her life preparing for this future, and she was more than happy to walk the path laid out before her.

The Ball itself was truly magnificent. The people were dressed in elegant and rich clothing, the food was impeccable and delicious, and she was the center of attention in the most pleasant of ways.

Plus, the Ball is where she met them.

The first was her love, the holder of her heart, Duke Hannibal Lecter.

The war hero was more than she could have ever imagined. He was refined and handsome, kind and courteous, and he looked at her like she was precious. She didn't know what the man saw in her, but she didn't want to question it.

After their first meeting at the ball and the magical dance they shared she saw him many more times. He would invite her to dinner and they would talk for hours while drinking wine. When the King asked for her help with the murder of another Noble, Hannibal was right there to comfort her and tell her everything would be okay.

He made her feel strong, and he never treated her differently simply because she was a woman. When he gave her the most beautiful dress she had ever seen and asked for her to be his date during the memorial gathering, she was truly ecstatic. She had never been more in love, and she was certain her life was only looking up from here.

There was only one, simple problem.

Viscount William Graham was like a dark, beautiful stain on her love story.

She first noticed him at the Courting Ball, even before the spectacle he made with his own Summon. He had been standing alone by a wall, but he was impossible to ignore. A quiet and cool power had wafted off him in waves, drawing the eyes of many, but his demeanor deterred anyone from approaching him.

His clothes had barely been up to standard, his hair was nearly a mess, and his blue eyes were obscured by a thick pair of glasses. He was nearly hunched by that wall, nursing his own glass of wine and watching the guests.

Alana couldn't help but look upon him and find him to be stunning. Surely if he was cleaned up and standing tall he would be the most magnificent man in the room, he would even rival the Duke.

When he suddenly showed his own Summon she had been shocked, but somehow against all odds she wasn't resentful. She didn't mind that she was no longer the only Summoner in the Kingdom, but she couldn't help but question the way Hannibal had looked at the other man.

It was like he was seeing water while trapped in a dessert, it made something inside her nervous.

The second time she met Will Graham he was like a completely different person. His stand was firm and filled with a confidence that wasn't fake. His clothes were simple, a mix of blacks and grays that highlighted his pale skin and his stormy eyes.

While he was again wearing his glasses they did nothing to hide the intensity of his eyes when he gazed at her. It felt like he was both looking through her, and like he wasn't seeing her at all. Somehow she felt like he had seen her every desire, and decided he didn't care one bit.

His Ravenstag stood before her Agne, and Alana could feel how nervous her Kirin was. Agne was afraid of the large Ravenstag, she wouldn't even try to assert her own dominance against the stag.

Something about Will Graham was cold and dark, just like his summon. His voice was like ice and full of interference. When Sir Hobbs thought less of her for being a woman, she could see that Will didn't agree, but she couldn't help but feel like the man was looking down on her in a different, deeper way.

It got under her skin, it made her want to melt his ice and understand everything he was seeing in the world.

When they entered the house she was able to see another side of him.

She felt nothing but horror and revolution at the sight of the bodies in the room, but Will had been completely unfazed. Alana could only watch him as he took off his glasses, as his stormy eyes turned dull and lost their life, as the room filled with a thick, heavy magic she was certain wasn't elemental.

She watched him until he stepped into the room, seeing something she couldn't even imagine. He was lost in whatever magic had taken him but she could take the gruesome sight no longer and had to leave before her stomach rebelled against her.

The third time she met the Viscount was at the memorial lunch.

He was like nothing she had ever seen before, and she hated how her heart skipped a beat when he entered the garden. He was completely dressed up, adorned in finery and lacking his glasses.

He was like the night sky had taken human form and was gracing the mortals with his presence. His magic felt stronger and more potent, his Ravenstag was slightly larger, and he commanded attention more than even Hannibal had.

Hannibal himself had watched the Viscount in something skin to exhilaration. She couldn't help but notice that he had never looked at her with such passion before. The problem was that she couldn't even blame the man.

She herself couldn't help but feel a dark slither of lust fill her heart as she watched the Viscount, a man a few years younger than herself, and most certainly more powerful than she currently was.

When she found the two men alone in the maze she understood that if she didn't get stronger, if she couldn't hold onto her love with both hands, it would be stolen away by Will Graham.

The worst part though was that Will wasn't trying to steal Hannibal from her, in fact she couldn't help but feel that Will was afraid of Hannibal.

She wished she could just hate the Viscount, but every time she thought about his stormy eyes that could see through her, her hatred would fizzle out into a sharp stab of something dark and nearly possessive.

Her heart was heavy and filled with confusion. Alana decided the best course of action would be to talk to Hannibal about her feelings, surely the older man would know what was wrong with her.

The monster before him was far more twisted than any description in a story could have painted a picture of.

A wendigo of sorts, a creature that was once human and yet consumed the flesh of its kin until it became an evil abomination. It was an apt description of Hannibal Lecter, if not lacking in detail and embellishments.

At his very core Hannibal was nothing more than a human soul, but that soul was surrounded by something far more heinous and corrupt than any mere mortal could handle. Will thought it was debatable to say that Hannibal could handle it in the beginning. The man simply continued to eat and consume until it didn't matter in the end.

Will was most afraid of the human heart, but seeing Hannibal in this form felt more simple. He could believe this was nothing more than an intelligent beast and not an all powerful God.

He wasn't afraid, not really. Hannibal wouldn't kill him, not like this. It was the only reason he was willing to play his card and admit to knowing the creature in the trees was the Duke. Saying it aloud put them on an even playing ground and it took away Hannibal’s ability to trick him with his true form.

His greeting was met with silence, but he wasn't surprised.

There was a warm ember of pride that filled his heart, relaxing the feathers that had been ruffled after their conversation in the garden. He hadn't enjoyed that Hannibal had had control of that conversation, so he was pleased that he managed to shock the man.

He truly hadn't expected Hannibal to venture from the cover of the trees and take two large steps towards him with his long, twisted legs. Will felt his heart stop and his hands become clammy with sweat. He thought that Hannibal would only stare at him for a moment and then leave.

The creature drawing closer was not something he planned for,

Instinctively he went still and held with breath. He couldn't look away and he couldn't blink, his eyes simply staring at the bright red eyes that were slowly filling his vision completely.

He didn't flinch when one massive, clawed hand slowly reached for his face.

He didn't make a sound when he felt the gentle and cold caress of a claw brushing his cheek.

He didn't blink when black lips pulled back from sharp teeth and stretched into a thin smile.

He didn't so much as twitch when he heard the soft whisper of a voice in his mind, sweet as honey and as painful as poison.

“Good evening dear Will. I hope this night treats you well.”

He could only breathe again when Hannibal was suddenly back in the trees, leaving Will with something akin to whiplash. He stared with wide eyes as the monster's grin took on a softer edge, still hearing the whisper of a voice in his mind.

“Sweet dreams dear one, sleep well tonight for the morning brings with it a new day.”

A single blink and Hannibal was gone, leaving a shivering Will and his Ravenstag alone under the moonlight, not even a dead body to keep them company.

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